A SERMON

PREACH'D before the

KING

AT

NEWMARKET,

On SUNDAY the 16*th* Day of *April*. 1699.

By *JOHN LENG*, B. D.
and Fellow of St. *Katherines-Hall* in *CAMBRIDGE*.

Publiſh'd by His Majeſties Special Command.

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Printed at the *Univerſity Preſs*, for *R. Clavel*, at the *Peacock* in St. *Paul's* Church-yard *London*, and *Edmund Jeffery* in *Cambridge*, 1699.

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ECCLES. viij. *ver.* xi.

Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil.

THE prodigious Wickedneſs of the generality of Mankind, in almoſt all Ages of the World, hath been a thing, with great grief of heart, taken notice of by good Men in their ſeveral Generations. Neither have thoſe alone who Laboured to Reform themſelves and others, been the only Complainers of this general defection from Vertue and Goodneſs; but even thoſe alſo, who have mightily increaſed the publick ſtock of Sin and Impiety, have often been as forward to declaim againſt the Wickedneſs of the

Ages they lived in, as other people; in ſo much that there are frequent Complaints of this kind to be found in *Lucretius*, and other ſuch *Heathen Writers*, whoſe very Principles inclined them to Senſuality as well as avowed Atheiſm: though according to the different Principles they went upon, they have given different Accounts of the cauſe of this Matter.

But as the *Holy Scripture* gives us the trueſt account of the depravedneſs of Human Nature in general, ſo it likewiſe beſt informs us of thoſe reaſons which Wicked Men frame to themſelves to defend their own Wicked Practiſes withall. And among others, this place, which I have choſen for the Subject of my preſent Diſcourſe, ſhews us the pretended Grounds that they go upon when they reſolve to do wickedly: and thoſe are, their Doubts about, or Disbelief of a Divine Providence, ariſing from their Obſervation of the ſlowneſs of Divine Rewards and Puniſhments. And therefore in the proſecution of theſe Words I ſhall endeavour to ſhew theſe two things.

I. That

I. That all the Impiety and Profaneneſs of Men, uſually either proceeds from, or is accompanied with a Disbelief, or at leaſt falſe Notions, of God and his Providence, or Doubting about future Rewards and Puniſhments.

II. That Disbelief, or Doubting about the Providence of God, is chiefly occaſioned by the ſeeming ſlowneſs of Divine Juſtice, or rather by Mens over haſty judging about ſuch Matters.

I. That all the Impiety and Profaneneſs of Men, uſually either proceeds from, or is accompanied with a Disbelief, or at leaſt falſe Notions, of God and his Providence, or Doubting about future Rewards and Puniſhments.

The Truth of which will appear from *Reaſon*, *Experience*, and the *Teſtimony* of *Holy Scripture*.

Firſt From *Reaſon*. That Mens outward actions ſhould generally be ſuch as their inward belief is (though they happen ſometimes to profeſs

contrary) is no hard matter to conceive. For though it be very plain that Men do not always practiſe according to their profeſſion, yet it is likewiſe as plain, that their outward profeſſion oftentimes proceeds not from any real inward and hearty belief of what they outwardly profeſs, but from Education or Cuſtom, or becauſe they cannot well tell what to ſay to the contrary. But as for the real Sentiments of a Man's Heart, they are better diſcovered by the general tenour of his Actions, than by any verbal profeſſion whatſoever. And therefore upon due conſideration it will appear, that Men's Vertues and Vices will naturally hold proportion to their right or wrong Notions of God and Providence, if we do but obſerve either, the Nature of Man, or the Great tendency which a true and ſincere Belief of the Attributes of God has to promote Vertue, and conſequently the cloſe Union that is between Vice and Atheiſm.

1. If we obſerve the Nature of Man in general, how apt his Actions are to be governed by his Principles. I would not be hereby underſtood

derſtood as if I thought that Men always acted according to what their own minds dictate to them as beſt to be done. For doubtleſs Men oftentimes, through inconſideration, or violence of temptation, or ſuddain ſurprize, do what they are heartily aſhamed of, and ſincerely repent for afterwards. But my meaning is, that the courſes which Men deliberately take, and reſolve to continue in, are uſually ſuch as their Notions of God and Providence, either prompt them to, or allow them in; Or elſe that they endeavour to form to themſelves ſuch Notions of God and his Attributes, as ſhall beſt ſuit with the courſes they deſign to perſiſt in. For Men are naturally inclined to live at eaſe and quiet with themſelves, and do not love to raiſe tumults in their own minds, and therefore if their Principles and Practiſes do diſagree, they will be ſure, as ſoon as they can, to reconcile them, becauſe it is a very uncomfortable ſtate to live in oppoſition to themſelves, and to be conſtantly doing of that, which they do as conſtantly condemn in their own minds. And if to this conſideration we add,

2. The ſtrong Tendency which a true belief of God and his Attributes, and the ſerious conſideration of future Rewards and Puniſhments have to produce a practiſe anſwerable, it will convince us that affected Atheiſm and Infidelity are cloſely link'd with Sin and Wickedneſs. For there is nothing that naturally works ſo ſtrongly upon our minds, as Hope and Fear. Now the due conſideration of the Attributes of God and the firm belief of his Almighty Power and impartial Juſtice joyn'd with the holineſs and purity of his Nature, together with a thorough Conviction of the truth of thoſe Threatnings that he has denounced againſt Sin, muſt of neceſſity work in us a fear of him: His infinite Wiſdom joyn'd with his unbounded Mercy and Goodneſs towards all his creatures, his pity and compaſſion towards all true penitents are the ſtrongeſt motives that can be, to hope and truſt in him; and therefore the bearing a conſtant ſenſe of theſe in our minds, muſt neceſſarily make us afraid of offending him preſumptuouſly, as well as hinder us from continuing in Sin, out of a deſpair of his Mercy.

So

So that we may from hence ſafely conclude, that whoever goes on ſecurely in a deliberate courſe of Sin and Wickedneſs, either has no ſerious belief of the being of a God at all, or elſe has very imperfect notions of the Holineſs, and Juſtice of his nature, or laſtly does not really believe thoſe Promiſes and Threatnings which he has declared to Mankind in Holy Scripture. For that a Man ſhould retain a quick and powerful ſenſe of theſe things in his mind, and yet at the ſame time go on ſtill in a courſe of Wickedneſs, is next to impoſſible. We ſee that in all other caſes Men are moved to action by arguments of infinitely leſs weight and moment. Hopes and fears of very ſmall conſideration in reſpect of theſe will determine them to undertake things of great difficulty and hazard, and to avoid things otherwiſe very pleaſant and tempting; and can we then think that in this caſe only they ſhould Act ſo very inconſiſtently with themſelves, as they muſt needs do, if the profeſſion which they make of the belief of theſe great and momentous Truths were any thing more than formal and ſuperficial. 'Tis true indeed,

indeed, there are but few people in the world that pretend utterly to disbelieve, or deny the Being of a God and Providence, and there is very good reaſon for it, becauſe when this point is preſt home upon them, they cannot with any ſhadow of reaſon maintain their ground in the defence of ſuch Principles. But it is likewiſe certain that a great many Men entertain ſuch falſe and unbecoming notions and opinions concerning the Nature and Attributes of God, as quite deſtroy all the Motives either to Religion or Morality; and from theſe opinions they encourage themſelves to go on in their Sins with ſecurity. But,

Secondly, Not only the Reaſon of the thing perſuades us, that a reſolved courſe of Sin and Wickedneſs proceeds from, or at leaſt is accompanied with Infidelity or undue thoughts of God and his Attributes, but Experience likewiſe teaches us the truth of this. For if we conſider the ſeveral ways, as well as the ſeveral ſteps and degrees by which Men are hardned in Sin, we ſhall find them commonly attended with anſwerable degrees of profane

ſane thoughts and imaginations concerning God and Providence.

Suppoſe, for inſtance, a Perſon from his childhood brought up under wicked and ungodly Parents, who have never Taught him any Senſe of Religion or Piety; if you come to examine him, what a ſtrange account will he give of matters relating to a future Life? If his own natural Reaſonings be not very quick, and the Grace of God very powerful over him, it will be hard to find, whether his Viciouſneſs or his Ignorance be more deplorable. He finds perhaps but little remorſe in himſelf for what he does amiſs, becauſe he could not but naturally conclude, from the Example which his Parents ſet him, that there was little to be lookt after but the gratifying of his ſenſual appetite in this Life. And therefore if ever you would awaken ſuch an one to a laſting Senſe of his Duty, it muſt be by firſt convincing him of the reality of a future ſtate, and the certain and inevitable ruin that will attend all impenitent Sinners: and till you can convince him of the neceſſity and importance of ſome of thoſe great and fundamental Truths which Religion Teaches,

'tis in vain to go about to inſtruct him, to any purpoſe, in the nature of Vice and Vertue, or to adviſe him to ſhun the one and embrace the other.

But now ſuppoſe, on the other hand, a Perſon that has had the happy advantage of a Godly and Religious Education, that has been well inſtructed in the Principles of Piety and Vertue, and Taught to live under the Senſe of an Almighty Being of infinite Juſtice, Holineſs and Power, as well as Mercy and Goodneſs; how tender is ſuch a Man's Conſcience in the Commiſſion of any Evil? And with what reluctance is he drawn to any deliberate Sin? And if he be, by the Violence of Temptation, and Power of evil Company, carried away into any evil courſe, what pangs of Conſcience and bitter trouble of Mind is he forced to undergo, before he can be throughly brought over to an entire complyance with his wicked Company? And when he does fall off from Vertue, if we do but obſerve the gradual Progreſs which he makes in Wickedneſs, we ſhall likewiſe ſee how his Notions of God, and his Belief of a Life to come, are proportionably impair'd and decay'd.

At

At firſt he endeavours to think as ſeldom of God and Religion, as he can, in cool blood: he begins by little and little to leave off the Duties of Prayer and Devotion, and all Religious Converſation; by and by he thinks ſuch things uſeleſs and inſignificant, and fit entertainments only for old Men and Children: Afterwards he goes on to jeſt upon or find fault with the *Holy Scriptures*, and to Diſpute againſt the Doctrines contain'd in them, till at laſt he comes to think them utterly inconſiſtent with Reaſon, falſe and ridiculous; and ſo diſcards all Reveal'd Religion as Folly and Nonſenſe: which when he has once done, he can deal more freely with that which we call Natural, and make it ſuit with his unruly Luſts and Appetites; and ſo at length having loſt all the reliſh of good and evil, he begins to think, either there is no Life at all after this, or elſe if there be, that God is no ſuch rigid Being as he is repreſented, ſo as to require any account of him hereafter how he has behaved himſelf in this World: and when he is come to this pitch, he can ſin on, and enjoy himſelf with great ſecurity, and wants but one ſtep of the groſſeſt

Atheiſm. Now that this is the Caſe of moſt habitual and reſolved Sinners, I think we may appeal to their own Conſciences, if they would but ſpeak without reſerve. And it were much to be wiſh'd, there were not too many inſtances in the World to confirm the Truth of it. For otherwiſe how comes it to paſs, that we have ſo many bold Diſputers againſt all Reveal'd Religion, that the Truth and Authority of *Holy Scripture* is by many ſo much decryed, and the Myſteries of the *Chriſtian Faith* ſo much ridiculed by thoſe whoſe Lives and Actions are a ſufficient Evidence, that they are indeed but too much in Earneſt in their Profane Diſcourſes. How (I ſay) could theſe things be, if there were not a very cloſe Connection between *Impiety* and *Infidelity*.

And this appears to be the Caſe not only of particular Men now and then, but if we look into the Hiſtories of whole Nations, we ſhall find, that according as the Senſe of Religion and the True Worſhip of God have obtain'd more or leſs among any of them, ſo their Moral and Political Vertues have more or leſs flouriſh'd: Inſomuch that even among Heathen Nations, thoſe,

thoſe, whoſe Idolatry and Superſtition has been more groſs and abſurd, have alſo been more Senſual and Brutiſh in their Manners. And on the contrary, the nearer their Religion has been to Truth, and the brighter Notions they have had of God, ſo much the more Vertuous and Praiſe-worthy have their Actions been. So that, both in Reaſon and Fact, we ſee that Wickedneſs of Life proceeds from, or at leaſt is accompanied with a corruption of the Fundamental Principles of Religion.

Now the main thing that can be objected againſt this, is that there are a great many in the world who are mighty pretenders to Piety and Religion, that ſeem very Devout and talk much of God and Goodneſs, who are notwithſtanding very deficient in the practiſe of Moral Honeſty, and have not ſo much Vertue and Integrity as thoſe very Men whom they account Profane and Irreligious: and that conſequently Vice and Wickedneſs are not ſo utterly inconſiſtent with the Belief of God and another Life, as they have been here repreſented.

But in anſwer to this, it ought to be conſidered, that it is not the outward pretence to

Piety, nor the external Profeſſion of Religion, though never ſo plauſible, that is to be look't upon as a True and Real Belief of God or his Providence, even though a Man go ſo far in it as to deceive his own ſelf. For while the outward Profeſſion of Religion is encouraged, Men that are much concern'd for the good opinion of the World, becauſe they gain by it, will be ſure to make a Pretence of believing as the beſt Men do; nay they will often Act this ſo far as to over-do it, and make a greater ſhew than thoſe that are truly Pious and Religious; inſomuch that they will not only deceive others, but themſelves alſo. But then this is in truth only Acting ſuch a part as they find will be moſt for their advantage, and proceeds not from any ſolid and laſting Foundation; For if it ſhould ſo happen, that Gain and Reputation, or the Countenance of Authority, or whatever elſe they value moſt, ſhould lye, with proſpect of any long continuance, on the ſide of Atheiſm and contempt of Religion, theſe very Men would then be as great pretenders to that; however they may miſtake themſelves while the caſe is otherwiſe. So that

in

in truth next to the down-right Profeſſion of Atheiſm, there are none that come nearer to it than the thorough Hypocrites, and therefore it is not without very great Reaſon that our Bleſſed *Saviour* ſo often joynes Hypocrites and Unbelievers together in the *Goſpel*. But,

3. Not only *Reaſon* and *Experience* make it evident, that Atheiſm and Infidelity are cloſely link't with Sin and Wickedneſs, but the *Holy Scriptures* likewiſe in many places Teſtify the ſame. For ſo *Pſal.* 14. 1. We are told that, *The fool hath ſaid in his heart there is no God*, which words, though they be ſometimes brought to ſhew the Folly of Atheiſm, and in that ſenſe be true enough, yet the plain natural and direct meaning of them is, that the wicked Man, who is frequently in *Scripture Language* call'd a *Fool*, has not in his Heart any true Belief of God and Providence, but ſecretly either diſbelieves, or queſtions his Being and Attributes, and endeavours, as much as he can, to thruſt the thoughts of him out of his Mind; and that this is the meaning of the place is fully made out by what follows; *Corrupt are they and have done abominable iniquity; there is none that doeth good.*

good. God looked down from heaven to ſee if there were any that did underſtand, that did ſeek God; They are all gone aſide, they are altogether become filthy, there is none that doeth good, no not one. Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my People, as they eat Bread, and call not upon the Lord? All which ſhews, that by the Fool is meant a Wicked Perſon, and the Wicked are ſuch as ſeek not after God, nor call upon the Lord. And ſo in the *9th Pſalm: The wicked and thoſe that forget God* are joyned together. And in the *10th Pſalm* ℣. 4. it is ſaid, *That the Wicked through the Pride of his Countenance will not ſeek after God; God is not in all his thoughts.* And again ℣. 11. *He hath ſaid in his heart, God hath forgotten, He hideth his face and he will never ſee.* And many more Expreſſions there are in the Book of *Pſalms* to this purpoſe. In like manner St. *Paul* ſhews at large, in the *Firſt Chapter* of the *Epiſtle* to the *Romans*, concerning the *Gentile World*, that the Reaſon of that great Corruption of Manners among them, was their falſe and corrupt Notions of God, and this not only by way of natural conſequence, but by the juſt

Judgment

Judgment of God upon ſuch perverſe and depraved Opinions; and that *becauſe they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, therefore God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do thoſe things that are not convenient.* And *Epheſ.* 4. 18. he ſays that, *the Gentiles being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, through the blindneſs of their heart, have given themſelves over unto laſciviouſneſs, to work all uncleanneſs with greedineſs.* From all which it plainly appears, that the corruption of Men's Manners ſprings from the want of a true and ſincere Belief of the Being and Nature of God, and therefore that Men may be truly accounted ſo far Atheiſts in their Hearts, as they are reſolutely Profligate and Debauched in their Practiſe. Proceed we therefore to conſider,

II. In the *Second* place, whence this Infidelity or Doubting ariſes, which thus hardens Men in Sin; and the Text tells us, it is *Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, i. e.* Men take occaſion to Doubt about Providence, and ſo *fully to ſet their hearts to do evil,* from the ſeeming ſlowneſs of Divine Juſtice in

diſpenſing Rewards and Puniſhments, or rather from their over-haſty judging about theſe matters.

I mention Rewards as well as Puniſhments, though the Text ſpeaks expreſsly of the latter only, *Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily*; and perhaps the Reaſon why it is expreſt more particularly on that ſide, may be this, becauſe there is ſo much ill nature generally in the World, that Men are much more offended to ſee any Man eſcape that deſerves Puniſhment, than they are concern'd for a good Man that miſſes of his due Reward, and more apt to obſerve the evil Actions of Men than the good: juſt as in the diſpoſal of Temporal greatneſs, it uſually raiſes a greater indignation to ſee an unworthy and vile Perſon preferr'd, than to ſee a deſerving Man neglected, or at leaſt much more than it raiſes our Joy and Gratitude to ſee a worthy Perſon raiſed to a deſerved Dignity. And beſides, baſe and unworthy Minds, ſuch as are moſt wont to Tax the Providence of God, are apt to be generally more mov'd by Principles of Fear than by Hope or Love; and therefore, when Puniſhment does not preſently overtake

take their faults, are ſoon perſuaded to disbelieve that Providence, which they think ſhould preſently puniſh, if he had any regard to what they do.

But notwithſtanding that the ſlowneſs of Divine Puniſhments only is mention'd in the Text, and perhaps for the Reaſon now aſſign'd: yet the ſlowneſs of Rewards alſo may be ſuppos'd to be a part of the Reaſon why Men Doubt of or diſbelieve a Providence.

Now that this *Long-ſuffering* of God is generally the occaſion of moſt Men's disbelief or perverſe Opinions of God and his Attributes, and conſequently of their hardning themſelves in Wickedneſs, appears not only from this Expreſſion of the *Royal Preacher* in the Text, but likewiſe from many other places of *Holy Scripture*, as well as from the common obſervation of Men's Practiſe in the World, and the Confeſſion of Wicked Men themſelves. Thus *Job.* chap. 21. deſcribing the Proſperous Eſtate of the Wicked, how *They live and become old and mighty in power, and their houſes are ſafe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them—but they ſpend their days in wealth*, &c. *Therefore* (ſays he) *they ſay unto God, depart from us, for we deſire not the knowledge*

of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we ſhould ſerve him? And what profit ſhould we have if we pray unto him? In like manner the Holy *Pſalmiſt* ſpeaking of ſuch Wicked Men, *whoſe eyes ſwell with fatneſs, and they have more than heart could wiſh*, adds thereupon, that *They corrupt others and ſpeak of wicked blaſphemy, their talking is againſt the moſt High. Pſal.* 73. 11. By which places and divers others it appears, that the proſperous condition of Wicked Men in this World, not only hardens themſelves in Sin, and makes them prone to forget God, but that others alſo ſeeing their worldly happineſs, and conſidering the mean condition of many good Men, are thereby tempted, through weakneſs of judgment and want of conſideration, to think hardly of the Providence of God, as if he were regardleſs of Good and Evil. And indeed the Temptation ſeems ſometimes ſo plauſible, that the Holy *Pſalmiſt* himſelf confeſſes, he was a little Staggered with it, till he reflected more ſeriouſly upon the Matter, in the forementioned *Pſalm* v. 18. 14. And the Prophet *Jeremy* complains *Chap.* 12. 1, 2. *Righteous art thou O Lord, when I plead with Thee; yet let me talk with Thee of thy judg-*

ments:

ments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked proſper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherouſly? Thou haſt planted them, yea, they have taken root, Thou art near in their mouth and far from their reins. Seeing therefore good Men themſelves are capable of being tempted, if they be not upon their guard, by the ſeemingly unequal diſtribution of theſe outward good things, to have ſometimes misbecoming thoughts of the Juſtice and Goodneſs of Providence, no wonder that Men ſtrongly enclined to be Wicked are enſnared and taken by ſuch Temptations. And accordingly we find that this is one of the moſt common, and as they think, faireſt and ſtrongeſt Pretences they make uſe of for the denying of Providence and encouraging themſelves in Wickedneſs. For after this or the like manner do they that altogether deny Providence Reaſon with themſelves.

We are told (ſay they) that there is a Divine Power that made and Governs this World, that particularly takes notice of all the actions of Men, and intends to reward the Good and puniſh the Wicked; but we ſee, in Fact, that many of thoſe, who are reckoned good and vertuous Men, are

oftentimes more miſerable than other People, that they ſuffer want and are in diſtreſs, are revil'd and perſecuted, even for their being good, as themſelves term it: or however, if they eſcape ſuch Treatment, yet they are as ſubject to Poverty and ſickneſs and the like Calamities of Human Nature as other People: and on the contrary, many of thoſe, whom they account impious and profane, often enjoy the greateſt Affluence of all good things. Health and Riches, Honour and Pleaſures fall as often to their ſhares as to others; nay ſome attain to the greateſt part of their outward Proſperity by the very Acts of the greateſt Villany and Baſeneſs. Now if there were ſuch a Wiſe and Powerful and Juſt Governour of the World as we are told there is, would he not preſently Thunder down his Vengeance againſt ſuch Exorbitant Contemners of his Authority, rather than ſuffer them one moment to proceed in their Rebellion againſt him. If an Earthly Prince ſhould take no more notice of affronts put upon his Perſon and his Laws, his Power and Authority would ſoon be little regarded. Since therefore things are thus negligently Manag'd (ſay they) how can we imagin that there is any ſuch Providence

Providence preſiding over the World, as takes notice either of our Good or Evil behaviour? had we not therefore better reſolve all into Chance, and make the beſt of our Lives while we enjoy them, and trouble our heads no further with the thoughts of God and Providence.

After this manner do theſe Men Reaſon themſelves out of all Senſe of God and Religion: and this is the very way mentioned by St. *Peter* 3. 3. *There ſhall come in the laſt days ſcoffers walking after their own luſts and ſaying, where is the promiſe of his coming* i. e. the Coming of *Chriſt* to Judgment: *for ſince the fathers fell aſleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.* We ſee no marks of any approaching Judgment, nor, as matters are managed, any likelyhood that ever any ſuch thing ſhould be. For the World (as far as we can ſee) is juſt in the ſame ſtate that it always was. But if there be really a Judgment to come, why does it not make more haſte? or at leaſt give ſome Symptoms by which we may gueſs that it will come at all, that we may ſee them and Believe? Such as this is the reaſoning of them that are entirely Infidels.

But

But then as for thoſe that are not altogether ſo bold, as utterly to deny Providence or the Being of a God upon this account, but yet are deſirous to enjoy their Sins as quietly and ſecurely as they can, they endeavour to frame to themſelves, from the Divine longſuffering and forbearance towards Sinners, quite other Notions of God, than the Holineſs and perfect Purity of his Nature will admit of.

We find (ſay theſe Men) that God is very kind and merciful towards Wicked Men: for we ſee many, that ſurpaſs us in wickedneſs, thrive in the World, and proſper very well; and therefore we believe he is not ſo utter an Enemy to all manner of Sin as he is repreſented: or if he be reſolved indeed to Puniſh Sinners, we hope it will be but gently, or however, we have Reaſon to think it will be a great while firſt, and therefore what need we trouble our ſelves with the matter at preſent? May we not ſafely Argue, with thoſe in the Poet:

Ut ſit magna, tamen certe lenta ira Deorum eſt &c.

If vengeance do but ſeize Men in order, 'twill be long before it come to our turn; and however when the worſt comes to the worſt, we ſhall eſcape as well as others. And

And in this manner do theſe Men endeavour with falſe imaginations, to lull themſelves aſleep in their wickedneſs, and take as little notice of God and Divine Vengeance as ever they can, till they awake in another World, and to their ſorrow find thoſe things true, which they are ſo unwilling to believe in this.

And thus it appears, how Men take occaſion to disbelieve, or doubt of, or embrace falſe opinions concerning the Providence of God, from the ſlowneſs of Divine Rewards and Puniſhments. But now though this miniſters the occaſion to ſuch concluſions, yet the fault is wholly in our own over-haſty judging of theſe matters. For the Reaſon, why we conclude thus raſhly againſt Providence, from theſe Appearances of things in the World, is not becauſe theſe things are really any blemiſh to Providence, or Argue any want of it in the World, if all things were duly conſidered; but becauſe we our ſelves, that thus misjudge, are to blame in ſeveral inſtances; as,

1. Becauſe we put too great a value upon the outward circumſtances of this Life; that is, we judge thoſe Men happy, whom we ſee abound in Wealth and Riches and worldly enjoyments,

not conſidering, that thoſe very Men may be really more miſerable than they whoſe condition we ſo much pity. We ſee their outſide indeed, and the abundance of good things that they ſeem to enjoy, but then thoſe many inward vexations and diſquiets, that they are troubled withal, thoſe we ſee not; beſides oftentimes the grievous pangs of Conſcience and apprehenſions of the Wrath of God, notwithſtanding all their endeavours to ſtifle them, which are a Thouſand times more irkſome than the meaneſt outward circumſtances. And therefore if we did but value theſe outward good things according to their real worth, we ſhould not think much with Providence, though Wicked Men poſſeſt the largeſt ſhare of them, ſince they are as often the means of making Men miſerable as they are of making them truly happy. But ſo long as we think the chief happineſs or miſery conſiſts in the having or wanting of theſe, 'tis no wonder we think amiſs of Providence.

2. Another Inſtance of our Arraigning providence without Reaſon, becauſe of the impunity of Evil Men, is that we judge without knowing or conſidering the Reaſons upon which it pro-

proceeds. Even in Human Governments, there are a great many Actions of our Superiours, that ſeem odd and unaccountable to thoſe who are at too great a diſtance to underſtand the Reaſons of them, which nevertheleſs it would be very raſh and unreaſonable to find fault withal before we do underſtand them. Now God is the great Governour of the whole World, and has infinitely more things to take care of than we can poſſibly comprehend; and therefore to judge of the whole of his Providence from ſome of thoſe few particular Inſtances, which we ſee indeed, but can not underſtand, is highly abſurd and fooliſh. It may be, the ſuffering one Wicked Man to proſper in his wickedneſs for a while may be the occaſion of doing good to abundance of innocent perſons, or of the puniſhing others as wicked as himſelf. So that untill we can certainly tell why, and for what purpoſe, God Almighty ſuffers any particular Man to proſper, we have no Reaſon to cenſure his Juſtice for it. Again,

3. Another inſtance of our over-haſty judging of the Conduct of Providence is in our paſſing Sentence before we ſee the final iſſue of

things. We ſee only the preſent Scene of things, and therefore to paſs our Judgment before the whole plot be unravelled, muſt needs be the cauſe of great miſtakes. Thus for Inſtance, if we were only to look at the firſt part of the Hiſtory of *Joſeph*, or of *Haman*, and conſider the hard uſage of the one, notwithſtanding all his Virtue and Piety, and the great preferment of the other, notwithſtanding all his Pride and Treachery; it would be a temptation to think Providence unobſervant either of the one or the other. But when we conſider the latter part of the Story of each of them, and obſerve the Gracious ends of Providence, in the preſervation of his People, ſerved by the mighty advancement of the one, and the ſudden downfall of the other, we ſhall be forced to co nfeſs the Juſtice and Wiſdom of God's dealing with them, and the unreaſonableneſs of Judging, before things were brought to that unexpected Concluſion.

In like manner, if we were, now at this time, only to look at the grievous ſufferings of ſome of our Proteſtant Bretheren abroad, for the ſake of Religion and a good Conſcience; we might raſhly conclude, that God had forſaken his Inheritance,

heritance, or took no notice of the afflictions of his People. But when we remember, that not many years ago, we our ſelves at Home were threatned with apparent Ruin, and yet that God was pleaſed to raiſe us up an happy Deliverer, who is ſtill, under God, their chief Support alſo, and conſider how God at preſent enlarges the Bounty and Compaſſion of many Reformed Princes and States towards them; we have Reaſon to hope that he has not utterly caſt off his People, nor is his Mercy clean gone for ever, but though he ſuffer them to be evil entreated for a while, as he did the *Primitive Church*, yet he will in the end make them meet for a glorious Deliverance. However till we can ſee the final iſſue, we ought not to accuſe Providence or charge God fooliſhly.

I might proceed to ſhew how unreaſonable our complaints of Providence are, from many more conſiderations; As, That the infinite Mercy and Long-ſuffering of God, are, if duly reflected on, a ſtrong proof of his Infinite Juſtice alſo, and therefore that thoſe, who now complain for want of Juſtice, would, if Things were otherwiſe, complain for want of Mercy: That

by this Conduct a great many excellent purpoſes of Providence are ſerved, which would otherwiſe be defeated: That many vertues of Good Men are hereby exerciſed: That Wicked Men have time and ſpace for Repentance: That all of us have herein an admirable leſſon of Patience and forbearance of one another: And that God has given other ſufficient Indications of the righteouſneſs of his Providence by many remarkable inſtances, even in this World. But the time will not allow me to ſpeak to theſe particularly: and therefore I ſhall only at preſent add theſe ſhort inferences which ſeem to follow from what has been already ſaid.

1. Since Wickedneſs of Life ſo naturally proceeds from, or is neceſſarily accompanied with a disbelief of the Nature and Attributes of God, we may from hence eaſily judge what progreſs Atheiſm and Infidelity make in the World. For the more open Vice and Wickedneſs, barefac'd Debauchery and avowed Profaneneſs get ground in the World, ſo much the greater proportion of Atheiſm and Infidelity muſt there neceſſarily be.

2. We

2. We may from hence alſo learn the great danger and miſchief of paſſing too haſty a Judgment upon the occurrences of Providence in the World, ſince Doubting and Disbelief of the Juſtice of God ſo uſually proceeds from thoſe wrong judgments which we make of God's Government of it. When we ſee things go otherwiſe than we imagin they ought to do, we ſhould have a great care of being too peremtory in our cenſures of the Righteouſneſs and Equity of God's proceedings, and rather patiently wait till we ſee the end. For we have much more reaſon to conclude, from the unequal diſtribution of preſent Rewards and Puniſhments, that there ſhall be a future Reckoning, when all things ſhall be ſet right, than we have, from the ſlowneſs of Divine Vengeance, to imagine that the Wicked ſhall always eſcape unpuniſh'd: ſince it is very abſurd to argue, that there ſhall be no Future Judgment, only becauſe that time is not yet come.

3. *And laſtly*, We may therefore conclude, that the beſt way to preſerve our Vertue and Piety, is always to retain fixt in our minds a ſtrong ſenſe of the Power and Providence of God: becauſe

cauſe, if we once let that go, we have loſt the greateſt reſtraint to all Sin and Wickedneſs. To this purpoſe, it is neceſſary to make uſe of all thoſe means, which God has preſcribed, for the keeping up a ſenſe of Religion in our minds, ſuch as frequent Reading and Hearing his *Holy Word*, ſerious Meditation, fervent and hearty Prayer, conſtant and devout receiving the *Holy Sacrament*, and the like; which are the beſt means of retaining in our minds a lively ſenſe of God and his Attributes, and conſequently of preſerving and improving us in all holineſs and righteouſneſs of life. And let us well remember what the *Royal Preacher* tells us in the *verſe* after the Text, that *Though a ſinner do evil an hundred times and his days be prolonged, yet ſurely I know that it ſhall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: but it ſhall not be well with the wicked.*

Now to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, be all Honour, Glory, Might, Majeſty and Dominion, for evermore.

THE END.

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